

Greenway Commission Minutes

April 8, 2010



Members present:

Marcia Bromberg, Vice Chair
Jim Grode
Susan Barlow
Glen Locascio

Staff present:

Seth Hender, Landscape Architect
Debbie Ivester, Assistant Director
Megan Hansen, Special Projects Coordinator
Sarah Tillinghast, Secretary
Blake Esselstyn, Planning Department
Barb Mee, Transportation Department

Guests present:

none

Marcia called the meeting to order at 3:33.

1. Approval of March Minutes

Marcia clarified that the proper name of the corridor referred to is Wallick Street, not Wallick Tract.

Glen motioned to approve to minutes, Susan seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

2. Public Awareness Campaign for Greenways

Marcia stated that public awareness involves forethought. She noticed in the old Greenway Commission notebooks, established during the 2002 retreat, that the commission technically has three sub-committees: community relations, public education, and community networking. She remarked how similar these were to each other, regarding getting the word out about greenways. Sue brought in an article in the *Laurel of Asheville* about the new French Broad River Extension greenway, and Marcia stated that she saw this as an opportunity for the Commission to play a role in promoting greenways. She would like staff to keep the Commission informed of any upcoming publications, and she would like the Commission to play a larger role in helping staff get the word out.

Marcia showed the Buncombe Co. Greenway Commission pamphlet to everyone, which contains a definition of a greenway, photos, and basic information. She also showed an older brochure that the Department had put together, that is now outdated. She asked if

staff is planning on producing a new brochure. Debbie clarified that staff is working on a comprehensive greenways/parks/facilities map.

Marcia stated that between budget, parks, recreation programs, etc., she understands staff has so many priorities; but the Commission only has one—Greenways. So she would like to see the Commission take the initiative on creating new promotional material. Debbie said that this would be helpful, but that the Department has a communications and public relations plan that any materials would need to adhere to. The Commission would need to work with Frank McGowan on ensuring proper branding and message.

Marcia stated that she would like to see a consistent visual image of a greenway between the City of Asheville and Buncombe County, even between RiverLink and other partners. She feels this would help the public better understand the greenway concept. Debbie emphasized that is why City staff has developed consistent branding. Coordinating with the County would be an additional step and might be challenging.

Debbie stated that the Department is also being consistent with signage, etc, among greenway systems and other systems. Glen asked if the City has a written branding guide that the County could look at. Debbie suggested reviving one of the public relations committees, and nominating that committee's chair to work with staff on coordinating branding. Debbie suggested Marcia assume that function since she already works with the County. Sue volunteered to chair the Community Relations committee, and all agreed she would work with Marcia on that.

Debbie stated that the City has a new Special Projects Coordinator Sr. who deals with these matters, and that we already have templates for some of these types of communications. Committee members would need to speak with Frank McGowan to prioritize brochures; staff time is not the only concern; there is also a need to find funding to print brochures.

Marcia showed Debbie the County's brochure as an example of a brochure that's cheap to print. Marcia expressed her interest in being a helpful Commission, not a hindrance to staff. Seth suggested funding as an area where the Commission could help, in addition to providing information and content for the brochures. Seth said it would be helpful for the Commission to help distribute brochures. Debbie stated that the Department is moving from brochures to rack cards, which contain a web address directing the user to a web site where the updated full information is. This helps keep printing costs down because the rack cards don't become out of date quickly. Marcia felt that the brochure contained a lot of valuable information, and focused on providing contact information as well. She felt that the greenways aspect of the Department website is difficult to find, so a link to it might not be very effective.

Marcia suggested creating a Facebook page for greenways, and asked if the City has any policies on that. Debbie stated that the City does have one Facebook page, and Departments can have pages that branch off of that. Staff won't manage a page for each separate park or greenway or facility; instead, everything needs to be built into the single

Department page. Seth inquired if it would be possible for the Commission to create their own “Friends of” page, but Debbie said no, because the Commission is officially part of the City of Asheville. Debbie clarified that the City is still trying to develop its policy on this. She encouraged the Commission to rely on the Department Facebook page, which is still under development. Sue asked if Frank will allow them to add necessary content regarding greenways, and Debbie said that they will need to coordinate with Frank and Al. She described the different information that the website vs. the Facebook page will contain.

Marcia expressed her worry that greenways will get “lost” in the Department-wide Facebook page. She feels now is a great opportunity in terms of health, environment, and other concerns among the general public. Debbie stated that until we know what our Facebook page will look like, staff really can’t answer these questions. Debbie also said staff is looking at updating the design and content of the web site. Marcia expressed her hope for the Commission to be kept in the loop and be as involved as much as possible, especially now that the Community Relations commission has been revived. Glen also suggested that if the County creates a Facebook page on greenways, that might be another venue for the Commission to help disseminate information. He felt the web address was a bit unwieldy and long as it stands.

In regards to the brochure, Marcia would like some additional content to put in the Asheville section. Jim suggested including something similar to what other municipalities have done, including a link to a map. Seth said he thought the greenways map was online under the Master Plan section, and he would confirm. Debbie stated that in regards to the brochure, generic information, City and County information, and contact information is all that is needed. Marcia stated that this brochure is intended as a very general introduction to greenways. Glen asked what our existing greenway mileage is; Seth clarified it is around 4-5 miles. Marcia felt we should not include that in the brochure, since it doesn’t sound impressive when compared to other cities.

3. French Broad River Greenway Ribbon Cutting

Megan reported on staff plans for the ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate completion of the French Broad River Extension. It will be held at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, May 14, at Wilson’s Riverfront RV Park. The Mayor is confirmed to speak, and other speakers may include Roderick and Marc, who would be asked to recognize the partners staff worked with, including DOT, MSD, Buncombe Co., and the RV Park owner. A draft invitation and press release have been prepared; the press release will go out two weeks before the event, and the invitation will go out in the next week or two.

Marcia expressed her desire to see an evite go out instead of a plain email invitation. Debbie stated that this is what staff created for the Livingston St Center groundbreaking, and staff could do something similar for this event. Marcia suggested the Commission help get information out; a flier would be great to have. Megan said staff can design the flier and provide it to the Commission.

Marcia asked if snacks could be provided, or some other fun things, such as inviting schools. Seth stated that the constraint is funding, and also minimizing the impact on the RV Park, since it is an operating business and the ribbon cutting will occur during business hours. Marcia again emphasized that she would like the ribbon cutting to be a large community event, so perhaps the RV Park is not the best venue. Seth clarified that the impact isn't necessarily about the number of people in attendance, but about major distractions that might disrupt business, such as a barbecue that lasted all afternoon.

Seth stated that our next opportunity to do a ribbon cutting or ceremony will be regarding the Reid Creek Greenway next spring. Marcia asked staff to consider making that ceremony a bigger, more fun event. Otherwise, she is afraid it won't be interesting news.

Sue reminded the board that the next meeting is the day before the event. Seth said there is another partner, David Donnell at Asheville Outdoor Center, who has an open field that might be available for use. Marcia asked if the Commission can talk directly to David to organize something, such as an event that would follow the ceremony. Seth stated that the City couldn't contribute funding toward any additional event. Debbie stated she would like Seth to be part of that conversation, if it happens. Glen liked the idea, and saw it as a promotion for Asheville Outdoor Center as well. Seth offered to email the group and coordinate.

4. Smith Mill Creek Corridor Update

Seth described the creek and its location and reminded the Commission that the Asheville Design Center came a few weeks ago to ask for the Commission's support. Staff has drafted a letter of support for them, clarifying that the City can't provide any financial support but can provide other types of support. Seth felt ADC is optimistic about the grant. The grant would fund the ADC to do a feasibility study; staff would have a limited role in that. He stated that staff is grateful ADC is willing to undertake such a large project. Marcia requested for Megan to send a copy of the final letter to the Commission, and Megan agreed to do so.

Seth described the contents of the letter, particularly regarding the possibility of its inclusion in the master plan. Marcia expressed her appreciation that staff worked so quickly to get this together. After the feasibility study, that would be the time to look at incorporating this corridor into the greenway master plan. Seth wasn't sure what the timeframe for the study will be.

Glen asked for clarification that the tour the Greenway Commission took included only Montford, and not Smith Mill Creek, which is correct.

5. Montford Corridor Update

Marcia described the tour the Commission took for the Montford corridor. She stated that there are constraints regarding the topography. Marcia asked for clarification that our current Master Plan incorporates the tract already. Seth clarified that the current plan does

allow for a river connection. The ADC brought to the attention of DOT that there should be a connection there, and DOT said they are fine with including this connection, but this would need to be reflected in the Master Plan. This does exist in the Master Plan, however, in the current map it appears the planned greenway ends before the river, though in fact it does continue to the river. So at this point, staff is going to make the graphic change to the map since it's just a technical issue and doesn't require public input or Council approval. DOT wants that updated information within 6 months. If they adopt Alternative 4B, staff will be in close discussion with DOT to make the greenway happen.

Marcia felt there's an easy way and a hard way: the connection we have now (Chamber of Commerce-Montford connection) is the easy connection; a connection from Montford Park under the highway would take much more effort and engineering. ADC is concerned DOT will select the easy option, though the hard option may be the better one. However, Seth clarified that Al spoke with DOT and they stated they are willing to consider the Montford Park greenway. If DOT requires that we must specifically have the Montford connection on the official plan in addition to the current Montford-Chamber connection, staff will then think about an amendment to the Master Plan. Though currently, it appears DOT is open to both options.

Marcia asked for a timeline on this process. Seth stated he feels there's a lot of distrust between ADC and DOT; and the Department doesn't have the same problem with DOT. So the Department is trying to bridge the gap and maintain neutrality. Seth stated that within the next few weeks staff will report back to DOT to provide them with a new map. Marcia asked if we would frame it as one of several possibilities. Seth stated that staff is going to support looking at Montford Park connection. Seth will report back to the Commission any news he hears from talks with Cathy Ball and DOT.

6. Staff Updates

Blake reported that, as GIS steward for Planning Department, he is aware that the County is working on mapping of recreational facilities and opportunities for outdoor exercise. The City and County share the responsibility of maintaining GIS road data/address points, and there are preliminary talks about also sharing greenways data.

Seth reported that regarding the French Broad River Extension, staff is working on riverbank reconstruction work for the RV Park. Staff is also addressing erosion issues in that area. Reid Creek Phase II is proving challenging; staff has to file for a variance with the Board of Adjustments in order to put the trail within the 30 ft aquatic setback. He's hoping the new ordinance will be passed before building the greenway, because it should have an exception for greenways. The hearing for the Board of Adjustments is May 24.

Seth stated that the Department has to make some adjustments in the City's storm water management plan as well. He is working with Public Works on this. He would like to start the greenway in May or June, but it may have to be pushed back to August, or even the spring. There are many pieces, such as permits, etc., that must be addressed first. He reported he recently got back the cost estimate, which is unfortunately quite high. Marcia

said that is one unintended consequence of a recovering economy. She expressed her understanding for how difficult it is to construct a greenway and commended staff for all their effort. Marcia volunteered the Commission to help by writing a letter, coming to meetings, or any other shows of support.

7. Asheville Parks and Greenway Foundation Update

Glen reported that the Foundation has hired its new Executive Director, Beth Russo, who formerly worked for Habitat for Humanity. She should be coming on board by the next meeting at the end of month. He'd like her to attend one of the Greenway Commission meetings soon. She'll start off part time, but the Foundation hopes the position will grow. He reported that there are slots on the Foundation board that need to be filled.

The benefit run they wanted to do in May will be delayed until July or later. The location has yet to be determined. Marcia expressed her interest for the race to go along a greenway; Glen stated they would like to see it go downtown as well. The Foundation is trying to come up with an interesting theme. Seth suggested making it a 10K run instead of a 5K, because there are fewer long races and it would be long enough to connect downtown to a greenway.

Marcia asked what the expectation is for the new Executive Director. Glen stated there will be a learning curve, but within a month or two she should be very active raising funds for some of these amenities, such as the Reid Center, Reid Creek Greenway, etc. Glen said he will try to get her to attend the next Greenway Commission meeting on May 13.

Debbie added that Frank and Roderick have been working on an orientation for the Foundation. Glen noted that the City is providing a workspace for her.

8. Buncombe County Greenway Commission Update

Marcia reported on the communications session that the Buncombe Co. Greenway Commission conducted; Sue and Stephen attended as well. The session discussed creating a Facebook page, and promoting the greenways in the news.

9. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:37 p.m.